

THE MASTER MIND

Novelized by
Marvin Dana, author
of "Within the Law,"
from the suc-
cessful play by
Daniel D. Carter



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(Continued.)

"Oh, he's not out yet! I just happened to be in the crowd there, and I heard you asking the cop about the guy that butted in and let you out. I got a line on that guy, and so I thought I'd get you wise."

"Young man, named Walter Blount from somewhere out west. He's staying in the city, though—got a house. The address is 212A East Thirty-ninth street. That's all. Good night."

"But wait! Tell me!" Wainwright began pleading. His appeal was useless. There came no response.

CHAPTER IV.

A Family Made to Order.
WILLIAM SLOOMER, alias Diamond White, alias Walter Blount, sat in the library of the house of which he was theoretically master and sought to divert his tedium by playing Canfield solitaire. Nominally he was indeed the head of the house, which had been taken in his name for the season, and he was about to entertain there his putative parents, come on a visit from their home in Laramie, Wyo. As a matter of fact, however, Walter was a puppet in the hands of the man who was serving him as butler. That ingenious individual, by name Andrew Allen, had decided that this particular thief would fit admirably into his schemes. The accomplishment of his design was not difficult, since at just this time Walter was closely pursued by the Pinkertons for a recent offense against the law, and the offer of an asylum was welcome.

Andrew had maintained so much secrecy as to the nature of his plans that Walter's curiosity was provoked, and this soon drove him to dissatisfaction with the situation, in which he quite forgot his first relief over securing a safe refuge from danger. Instead he grew fretful over the dull routine of days and nights. He was disheartened by nature, a thief by choice. His slightly prognathous jaw showed merely moral degeneracy, not firmness of will. At twenty-five years of age he was a thorough-paced scoundrel, willing for any crime, but incompetent. Nevertheless as yet his evil nature was not given clearly in the lines of his face, which a careless observer might have deemed winningly boyish. Now as he sat erect in his dinner jacket by the table on which the cards were displayed he did justice by his appearance to the judgment of Andrew in this selection as the pseudo young gentleman of means come out of the west for a trial of the metropolitan life. He scowled heavily, and his jaw shot out sullenly as the trial of the cards proceeded. His lackluster eyes shot a baleful glance toward the irresproachable manservant, who for some time had been standing at a little distance in an attitude of patient deference.

"Well, Parker," he snapped, "what the devil are you standing around waiting for?"

"For you to finish the game, sir."

"And then what?"

"To take the cards away, sir."

The young man sneered.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" he drawled. "You're waiting to take the cards away."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Andrew's orders, sir."

The words, however spoken, were the last straw to the burden on Walter's patience. With an oath he seized the pack and threw it violently to the floor.

"Well, take them away, then!" he snarled, with an evil grin. He sprang to his feet and moved about the room nervously for a minute.

"Say, you!" he cried. "You know who I am, don't you?" he demanded.

And now there came a subtle change in the inflections of the man's voice, though its respectful quality was still in evidence. There was a vague suggestion of satisfaction in his tones as he answered:

"Yes, sir."

Walter muttered a curse.

"Keep it to yourself, might I suggest, didn't you?" he affirmed rather than interrogated. "Oh, I was on to you the minute I saw you!" Walter spoke with some relaxation of his aggressive manner, for it was a relief to cast off disguise in the presence of this fellow.

"What's Mr. Andrew—tell me, Parker, what's he up to?"

"He's got to show me," Walter stormed. "That's all. He's got to show me what this game is about or I'll

quit."

Walter's gaze followed in astonishment the figure of the servant as it went noiselessly out of the room, and not until it had vanished into the hall did he observe another form which was standing motionless just within the doorway—that of Andrew himself.

There was a dead silence while the Master Mind walked slowly forward until he stood close, face to face with his tool. Though he wore a livery, as befitting his pretended place in the household, there was nothing of the servile in the clear-cut face and the erect body as his keen gray eyes regarded speculatively the disconcerted youth before him. His tone was mild when he spoke, but he ran in it an undertone of menace.

"You won't continue?"

Walter had recourse to bluster.

"No, I won't!" he declared gruffly. "You heard me say it the first time, didn't you?"

"Very well, then," Andrew vouchsafed, still in that voice of ominous calm. "I suppose that I must notify the Pinkertons so that you may return to your former condition—the condition in which I found you. Shall I?"

The young man labored to preserve an undaunted demeanor.

"At least," he vouchsafed sulkily, "I should know where I was."

"Oh, there could be no doubt as to that," Andrew conceded with a grim smile. "And you would know your destination also for a certainty—Sing Sing."

Andrew wasted no time in pleading. Instead, he went to the telephone at one end of the long library table and spoke into the transmitter.

"Hello! Give me 100 Recto."

The voice of Walter sounded swiftly.

"Say, what's that number?"

The Master Mind turned from the telephone in leisurely fashion and regarded the young man with cold disdain. He placed a hand over the transmitter and replied with significant brevity, though quite without emphasis:

"The Pinkertons."

"Wait, Andrew, wait!" Walter cried desperately. "I'll stick," he said faintly.

Andrew put down the instrument and once again faced Walter. Now, his face was menacing. Hereafter, please remember, Diamond, the next time I have occasion to call you Diamond Willie a Pinkerton will tap you on the shoulder."

Under the taunt the fickle mood of the youth flared in a new rust of rage.

"Say," he cried viciously, "who the hell are you, anyhow?"

Instantly the Master Mind assumed the respectful demeanor of the faithful family retainer.

"Why, sir," he said gently, "I'm your confidential man and valet and butler, you know, sir. Why, Master Walter, I have served your father for many years."

This reference diverted the victim's attention again to the general subject of his grievance over enforced ignorance.

"Father, huh?" he exclaimed, with a jeering laugh. "Say, when am I going to meet these fake parents and this sister of mine? Why shouldn't I be curious, I'd like to know? Answer me that. You've been drumming them into me all this time."

"On your table, Walter, you will find a memorandum containing the instructions you are to follow when Mr. Wainwright comes," was the reply.

"Oh, that!" sneered Walter. "I've been over it already a dozen times to-day for want of anything better to do in this dead and alive house of mine—not! But what's the use of it! Wainwright ain't coming."

"He will come," was the unperturbed answer. "He thinks you saved his life last night from the attack of some fellow he had sent up the river."

"Well, suppose he does. That doesn't prove that he'll come here."

The Master Mind smiled coldly.

"Of course," he admitted, "you could hardly be expected to understand. But he is a gentleman, Walter, and he will therefore come to thank you."

The thief flushed hotly under the unveiled insult of the words, but he showed no disposition to resent it.

"How can he?" he persisted. "According to your instructions, I beat it right after the shooting. Wainwright hardly got a glimpse of me, much less of my name and address. I'm thinking."

"I attended to that," Andrew answered.

Walter voiced apprehension in another direction.

"That fellow ain't no runny," he objected querulously. "Say, if I'd ever known the game was against Wainwright I wouldn't have come in. The Pinkertons would be just as safe, believe me. Whenever he went after a

man he got him. They say he even got the goods on the Master Mind somehow and has him baffled. Anyhow the Master Mind went out of business and hasn't been heard of for years. And you must know what he was. There wasn't anything he couldn't pull off till Wainwright came along."

"Yes, I've heard of him," Andrew admitted.

Walter went on, speaking with enthusiasm.

"Why, that fellow was the cleverest this country ever produced," he declared, with sincere admiration in his voice. "I tell you he only touched the high spots—banks, corporations, the classiest things going. The men that worked for him even never got their jumps on him, and the bulls never had nothing on him. And then Wainwright got after him and threw a scare into him so he up and got cold feet and quit. So what chance you got? Huh!"

"That question need not concern you in the least, Walter. It is sufficient for you that I have guaranteed your safety." He paused as Parker appeared in the doorway waiting for his attention.

"Mr. and Mrs. Blount have arrived, sir," Parker explained. "They are in the drawing room, sir."

"Tell them that I shall see them at once," Andrew directed. "Let me know instantly when Miss Blount arrives." He nodded dismissal to the servant and turned again to the fuming young man opposite him. His voice pounded in sharp command, "You, Walter, will go to your room at once and study the memorandum until I send for you to meet your parents."

As he passed into the drawing room Andrew cast one swift glance toward a small table on the far side of the room and noted with an almost imperceptible smile a tiny shimmer of blue light that shone from the solitaire diamond placed there in readiness for the coming of his guests. The husband

of the Master Mind was not to be deceived.

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for a little while."

Then steps sounded in the hall, and Walter appeared in the doorway.

There was a sarcastic inflection in Andrew's voice as he made the introductions with a wave of his hand:

"Walter, your father—your mother, Mr. and Mrs. Blount, your son."

Without another word he turned and went out of the room.

It was Blount who first spoke. With a bluff cheerfulness of greeting in his heavy voice, he said:

"Well, well! How are you, son? He smiled a genial welcome."

Walter replied briskly in kind:

"Fine, dad!"

A snort of indignation from Mrs. Blount interrupted the complacency of the two men, who turned toward her interrogatively.

"What's the matter, mother?" the husband questioned, with a touch of solicitude in his manner.

The wife in her turn assumed a pose

suited to the event and spoke in tones broken with emotion.

"This is all so—so affecting!"

"Huh!" Walter ejaculated humbly. "I guess—"

Mrs. Blount interrupted:

"Father, why don't you introduce me to my son?"

"Sure do!" Walter remarked, with a grimace. "I'm just dying to meet mother."

Blount cleared his throat impressively and spoke with a bow as low as a generous paunch would permit.

"Mother," he said tenderly, "this is our son—our only son to this date, Walter."

Mrs. Blount beamed roguishly.

"Ain't he the cute little son?" she gushed. "Oh, sonny!" She advanced with fond haste toward the disconcerted Walter, with the evident intention of bestowing on him a cheery embrace.

"Aw, cut that out!" the son cried, disgustedly, as he drew back in alarm before the threatened onslaught.

"Why, Walter?"

"Oh, thunder!" Walter expostulated. "Say, what's the use of that bunk?"

Mrs. Blount spoke seriously now.

"No use, of course," she admitted gravely. "It's funny though," she added, a little wistfully, "just for a minute I felt, somehow, like you might be my boy, sure enough—the one I never had. Ain't that the limit now?"

"Well, I ain't!" the young man declared crossly. "So we'll cut out the cuddling. See?"

Mrs. Blount's humorous sense of the situation caused her again to speak.

"I can't see that he's changed a mite, dad," she remarked, with a mellow gurgle of laughter.

"Aw, cut that!" Walter insisted sullenly.

"Do you know what you're up against?" he questioned shrilly. "I tell you, straight, this game's dangerous. Do you know, it's some kind of a frame-up Andrew's got against Wainwright?"

"Wainwright!" Blount cried, aghast at this disquieting statement as to the thing in which he had become involved. "You don't mean the one here—the one that was district attorney?"

"That's just the guy I mean," was the savage assurance.

Blount showed symptoms of alarm. His ruddy face grayed a little, and the heavy flesh of the jowls sagged.

"It don't look good to me," Blount confessed soberly. "What's the idea?"

Walter shook his head in admission of ignorance.

"All I know is that he's got it in for Wainwright." Again he shook his head. "That's all I know. Whatever it is, it's something fierce. If you don't believe me just mention the name of Wainwright some time when he's around. You watch him then, and I'll see all right."

By a great effort of self control Blount reassumed his manner of geniality.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed patronizingly. "I really must look into this matter, quite in the interests of my friend. You know, I'm an old friend of Andrew's, and merely to oblige him I've agreed to adopt a son and daughter for a few weeks."

Mrs. Blount spoke aggressively.

"Yes, John," she said, "and you know he absolutely assured us that the whole thing was only a harmless joke. He hesitated slightly, then continued doubtfully. "But if it's as Walter says—"

"Listen here, son," he said presently, with a return to his kinder manner. "If I'm going to be a father to you, I've got to be it all the time, that's certain—not merely when somebody else is around. I can't be a fond father one minute and then be hating you inside the next, although when this thing is all over I might feel some different. But as long as we're on this game I'm going to think a heap of you. Yes, that's the program, and it's got to be carried out no matter how much it hurts me."

(To Be Continued.)

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